

# **An Introduction to the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped**



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This booklet describes the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). Whether you are new to the program or interested in library services for blind and physically handicapped persons, this functional summary of programs and services may be helpful. The following pages survey the history of the national reading program and describe the materials and equipment available to patrons. Also outlined are the organizational structures of NLS and the extensive network of cooperating libraries. A list of publications is included for your reference.



# History

The Library of Congress program that is now the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped was created on March 3, 1931, when President Herbert Hoover signed into law the Pratt-Smoot Act. The process that led to passage of the act began more than two years earlier when three separate bills were submitted to Congress to provide embossed books for blind adult readers.

A national reading program was needed because the difficulty of producing, storing, and shipping these large volumes in small quantities made production by private industry unprofitable. Service-oriented nonprofit groups could produce braille books but only in limited amounts, and most were religious works, textbooks, or books for young readers. The demand for general material had increased as more people graduated from schools for blind students.

In 1933, with development of the long-playing 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm record and phonograph for this program, Congress authorized a major expansion to include recorded materials. Talking books have been provided since 1934. Congress again extended the program in 1952 to include blind children as well as blind adults, in 1962 to provide music instructional materials and scores, and again in 1966 to include individuals with physical handicaps that prevent them from reading standard print.

The ensuing years have been marked by steady growth in the program's scope and technical achievements. Magnetic tape cassettes make up the largest share of talking books distributed today. And total readership has grown to nearly 800,000.

But there is much yet to be done. NLS hopes to reach thousands of eligible readers still unaware of the services available to them. And new technological applications in engineering design and materials distribution promise improved access and services to patrons in the future.

# NLS Collection

Books are selected on the basis of their appeal to a wide range of interests. Bestsellers, biographies, fiction, and how-to-do-it books are in great demand. The national book collection currently contains more than 35,000 titles. Each year about 2,000 titles are mass-produced for distribution through network libraries. Another 450 titles, recorded on tape or transcribed into braille by volunteers, are circulated in more limited quantities. Titles expected to be extremely popular are produced on flexible disc in several thousand copies and circulated to borrowers within several months of their publication in print form. Free subscriptions to more than seventy popular magazines on disc and in braille are also offered through the program.

NLS utilizes the production capabilities of commercial, nonprofit, and volunteer outlets to produce quantities of books ranging from a few copies to more than a thousand copies. The quantity of any title produced is dependent on expected reader demand and the pertinency of the work to the network library collections.

Additional reading materials are produced by regional and subregional libraries and other agencies to provide books of local and regional interest, and other publications not a part of the NLS collection. Persons interested in special music materials may receive them directly from the Music Section of NLS.



# Equipment

The following equipment is loaned free to eligible readers as long as Library of Congress materials are being borrowed.

*Talking-Book Machine.* Plays hard and flexible discs at speeds of  $33\frac{1}{3}$ ,  $16\frac{2}{3}$ , and  $8\frac{1}{3}$  rpm (revolutions per minute).

*Cassette-Book Machine.* A machine for playback only, operating at speeds of  $1\frac{7}{8}$  ips (inches per second), the speed of commercially recorded material, and  $1\frac{5}{16}$  ips, the NLS standard speed. Includes 2-track and 4-track capability.

*Headphones.* May be used for private listening with either type of machine.

*Pillowspeaker.* For handicapped readers who are bedridden.

*Amplifier.* Boosts sound levels for readers with significant hearing disabilities. Distribution of the amplifier, which is used in conjunction with headphones on both machines, is tightly controlled because of the danger of permanent injury it presents to persons with normal hearing. A separate application requesting medical certification is required.

*Tone-Arm Clip.* A plastic device attached to the talking-book machine tone arm for readers who have difficulty in grasping the tone arm.

*Extension Levers.* Provided for readers who have difficulty in operating the key controls of the cassette-book machine.

# Eligibility

The following persons are eligible for loan service:

1. Blind persons whose visual acuity, as determined by competent authority, is 20/200 or less in the better eye with correcting lenses, or whose widest diameter of visual field subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees.
2. Other physically handicapped persons as follows:
  - a. Persons whose visual disability, with correction and regardless of optical measurement, is certified by competent authority as preventing the reading of standard printed material.

- b. Persons certified by competent authority as unable to read or unable to use standard printed material as a result of physical limitations.
- c. Persons certified by competent authority as having a reading disability resulting from organic dysfunction and of sufficient severity to prevent their reading printed material in a normal manner.

In cases of blindness, visual disability, or physical limitations, “competent authority” is defined to include doctors of medicine; doctors of osteopathy; ophthalmologists; optometrists; registered nurses; therapists; professional staff of hospitals, institutions, and public or welfare agencies (e.g., social workers, case workers, counselors, rehabilitation teachers, and superintendents). In the absence of any of these, certification may be made by professional librarians or by any person whose competence under specific circumstances is acceptable to the Library of Congress.

In the case of reading disability from organic dysfunction, competent authority is defined to include doctors of medicine and doctors of osteopathy who may consult with colleagues in associated disciplines.

Qualified readers must be residents of the United States, including the several states, territories, insular possessions, and the District of Columbia, or American citizens domiciled abroad.

In the lending of books, recordings, reproducers, musical scores, instructional texts, and other specialized materials, preference is given to the needs of blind and physically handicapped persons who have been honorably discharged from the armed forces of the United States.

The reading materials and sound reproducers may be loaned to individuals who qualify, to institutions such as nursing homes and hospitals, and to schools for blind and physically handicapped persons for their use only. They may also be used in public or private schools where handicapped students are enrolled; however, the students must be certified as eligible on an individual basis and must be the direct and only recipients of the materials and equipment.

# NLS Organization

## *Office of the Director*

The Office of the Director forms policy, plans programs, and administers the \$30-million-plus budget, of which over 90 percent goes directly for books, magazines, equipment, and publications used by patrons.

An Automated Systems Coordinator plans, initiates, and monitors all significant NLS automation projects. The Project Coordinator, a staff officer for research and development, considers research needs, identifies projects, and monitors their progress. Projects are addressed in terms of reader reaction, cost, production, and time and space considerations. Field testing and consumer participation are integral parts of the R&D process.

The Public Resources Officer is the principal liaison with postal authorities, resolving questions related to the free mailing privilege for reading materials and equipment used by blind and physically handicapped individuals.

## *Administrative Section*

Responsible for personnel and fiscal matters, including coordination of contractual activities.

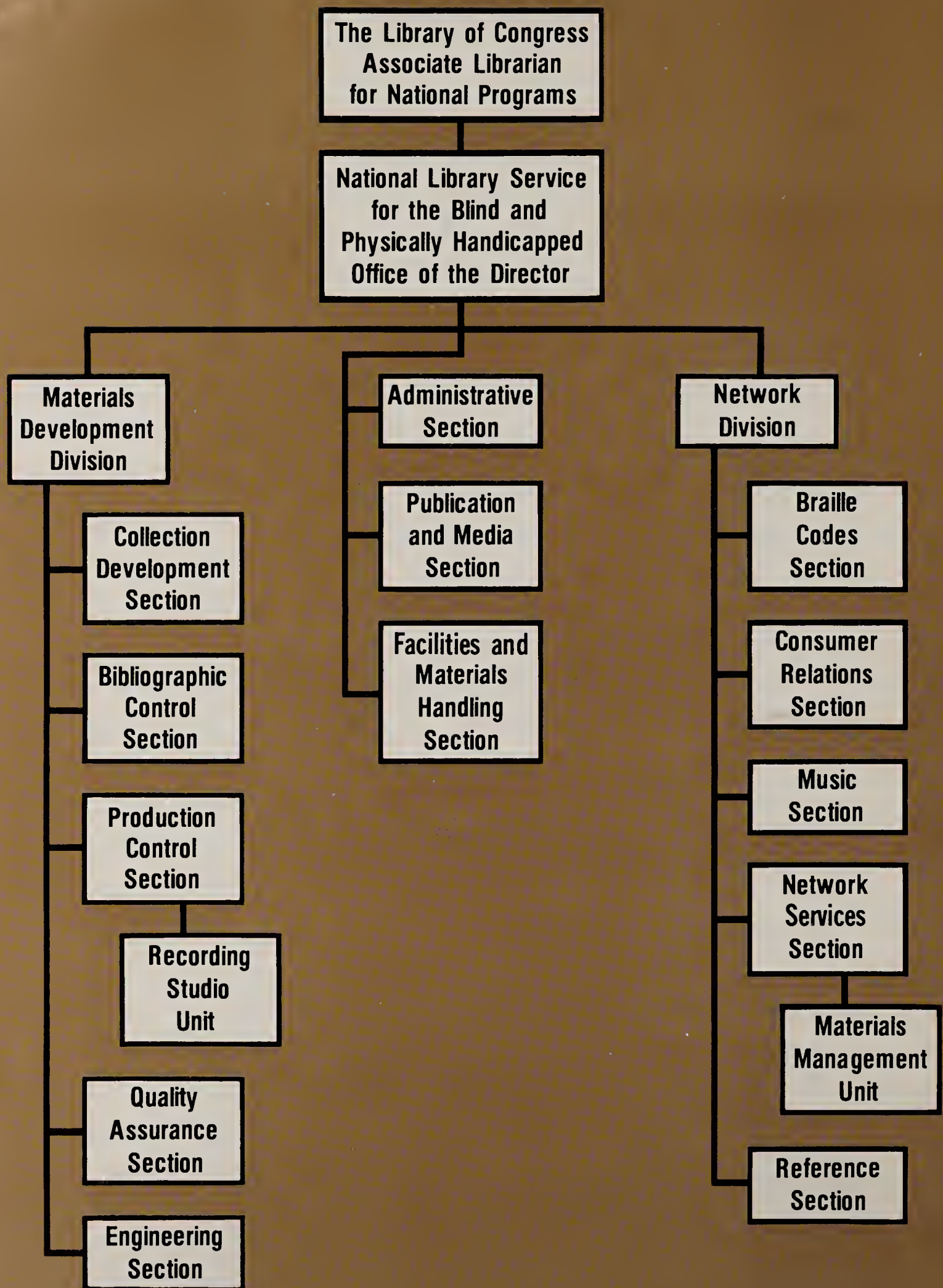
## *Publication and Media Section*

Plans and oversees publication and production of magazines, catalogs, bibliographies, newsletters, brochures, and other materials distributed to patrons, network agencies, groups concerned with handicapped individuals, and the general public. This section also coordinates NLS exhibits at national conferences of health, education, and community service professionals, and develops mass-media public-service materials used by network librarians to help raise public awareness of the talking-book and braille reading program.

## *Facilities and Materials Handling Section*

Coordinates shipping and receiving activities and maintenance of the NLS building.





**National Library Service Organization**



## *Materials Development Division*

The Materials Development Division selects, distributes, and oversees bibliographic control of reading materials, and develops, tests, and evaluates related equipment. Within this division, current models of playback machines for disc and cassette books undergo constant review for updating and improvement, and new products are tested. Those proven useful to patrons and also cost-effective are incorporated into the program.

The Equipment and Materials Maintenance Officer coordinates repair and maintenance of all cassette and talking-book machine models in use by patrons. Thousands of volunteers from across the nation contribute their skills, tools, and space for machine maintenance.

### *Collection Development Section*

Selects reading material on the basis of literary reviews, reader requests, and recommendations of network and consumer advisory committees. About 2,500 new and established titles are chosen each year for the national reading program to satisfy the reading interests of people of all ages and backgrounds. After selection, copyright permission is obtained from the publisher, an annotation is written, and the section decides whether the book will be recorded, brailled, or both. This section is also responsible for building a foreign-language collection.

### *Bibliographic Control Section*

Catalogs new titles and enters them in the NLS computer-produced microfiche catalog, which is distributed to each network library. This catalog, which is updated quarterly, is a complete record of the NLS national collection. It also lists local network-produced books available on interlibrary loan, plus holdings of other organizations, to create a national union catalog of books in special formats for blind and physically handicapped persons.

### *Production Control Section*

Assigns books to various contractors for production in the determined format and quantity and oversees distribution to network libraries. Its Recording Studio Unit provides guidance to manufacturers and volunteers, and narrates a limited number of books and other materials.

### *Quality Assurance Section*

Assures quality and performance of all braille and recorded materials, as well as all equipment produced for NLS under contract and by volunteers in conformance with established standards and specifications. Control copies of every cassette, disc, and braille publication must be approved before final production and distribution. Contractor facilities are also periodically reviewed.

### *Engineering Section*

Prepares detailed technical specifications for production of equipment and braille and recorded books and magazines, and certifies compliance with specifications. Conducts design review with consumer groups and promotes design consistency by maintaining an engineering change panel. Provides state-of-the-art equipment and book design.

## *Network Division*

The Network Division manages activities related to network development, guidance, and monitoring of service to users; determines user eligibility; and maintains liaison with related agencies, volunteers, consumers, and the general public.

### *Braille Codes Section*

Prepares guides and teaching manuals on all codes of braille. Transcribing courses leading to official Library of Congress certification are offered to volunteers in literary, music, and math braille, usually through local groups or network libraries.

### *Consumer Relations Section*

Maintains liaison with patrons and organized groups representing blind and physically handicapped individuals. This section circulates books to patrons who live abroad, handles international interlibrary loans and the foreign exchange program, and assists network libraries in developing volunteer programs.

### *Music Section*

Develops, maintains, and promotes direct library services for blind, partially sighted, and physically handicapped musicians. The NLS music collection consists of more than 30,000 titles, including large-print and braille music scores and books about music, and recorded self-instructional courses on cassette and disc. NLS-produced music periodicals are also available by free subscription.

### *Network Services Section*

Assists network libraries in carrying out their day-to-day activities. Staff consultants visit libraries to review their operations and offer guidance. The section maintains frequent contact with all four multistate centers, and works closely with them and all network agencies to assure proper inventory and handling procedures for millions of dollars worth of playback equipment and accessories distributed to readers. It also develops audio-book production programs and provides guidance and training to network library and volunteer-operated recording studios to promote high quality standards in book production. Interlibrary loan services are offered to network libraries, and subject bibliographies are compiled for mass distribution or to fill individual requests. A Materials Management Unit maintains and circulates NLS special book collections, maintains the NLS archive at Landover Center Annex, and coordinates a program for the redistribution of excess copies of books among network libraries.



### *Reference Section*

Provides reference and referral services to staff, network agencies, and the public. This section prepares circulars, bibliographies, and other publications on topics of concern to handicapped persons. These are distributed without charge to answer the many inquiries about the national reading program and about various aspects of handicapping conditions. The Reference Section is also the repository for all current data and history on the NLS program.

## **Network**

NLS administers its national reading program through a cooperative network that has grown from the original 18 libraries in 1931 to about 160 state and local libraries. This network services a total readership of nearly 800,000, circulating 600,000 braille items and more than 16 million recorded books and magazines each year.

The network is divided into four regions of approximately thirteen states each: North, South, West, and Midlands. Libraries in each region also belong to their own regional conference, headed by a chairperson and other officers elected by the librarians.

Each region has a multistate center, an NLS agency that functions as a materials-support unit for its specified network libraries. The center houses and lends to libraries national program materials. It also stores and ships to network libraries backup supplies of sound reproduction equipment, publications, forms, and other materials.

As of 1981, the network had fifty-six regional libraries in forty-eight states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Routine services include book circulation, outreach, publicity, tape duplication, equipment assignment, publications distribution, reader advisory service, reference, and production of local-interest materials.



Subregional libraries are local—usually public—libraries designated by a regional library, with NLS approval, to provide complete service to the residents of a specified part of the regional library's jurisdiction. Generally their collections include current recorded books only. Subregional libraries provide book services, publicity, reader assistance, and enlistment of public and volunteer support.

Machine-lending agencies are state and local agencies—usually regional libraries—designated by NLS to receive, issue, and control federally owned and supplied equipment, including specially designed record players, cassette machines, and accessories.

Deposit collections include materials furnished to separate institutions, such as nursing homes, convalescent centers, hospitals, and public libraries with walk-in services. Demonstration collections are used for display and information purposes, or to provide emergency service to readers.

## Publications

NLS publications inform readers of materials available through the free reading program, including descriptions of thousands of fiction and nonfiction books and magazines. They may also serve as reference tools for agencies, institutions, and media.

### *Ongoing Publications— Magazines and Newsletters*

*Braille Book Review.* A bimonthly magazine in large-print and braille editions. Lists new press-braille and handcopied-braille books. A brief annotation describes each book.

*Contemporary Sound Track: A Review of Pop, Jazz, Rock, and Country.* Available only on cassette, this bimonthly publication contains articles selected from print magazines for readers interested in the popular music scene.

*News.* A quarterly newsletter in print and in braille editions on current program developments, and international and network library activities.

*Talking Book Topics.* A bimonthly magazine in flexible-disc and large-print editions. Lists new disc and cassette books. A brief annotation describes each book.

*The Musical Mainstream.* A bimonthly magazine in braille, cassette, and large-print editions. Contains articles selected from print magazines. Articles are of general music interest and on the study and performance of the classics.

*Update.* A quarterly newsletter in print and in braille editions on volunteer braille, recording, and machine-repair activities of the national program of library services for blind and physically handicapped individuals.

## *Catalogs*

*Braille Books.* Lists braille titles that appeared in *Braille Book Review*. Published biennially.

*Cassette Books.* Lists cassette titles that appeared in *Talking Book Topics*. Published annually.

*For Younger Readers: Braille and Talking Books.* Lists braille, cassette, and disc titles for younger readers that appeared in *Braille Book Review* and *Talking Book Topics*. Published biennially.

*Libros Parlantes.* A bilingual listing of Spanish-language materials available in cassette or disc. Includes a general index in Spanish and English.

*Music and Musicians* series. In large print and the format described in the specific catalog's title. Lists NLS music collection titles, including braille books and vocal and instrumental scores, large-print books and scores, and instructional recordings.

*Talking Books Adult.* Lists disc books announced in *Talking Book Topics*. Published biennially.

## ***Subject Bibliographies***

***Bestsellers.*** Lists cassette, braille, and disc fiction bestsellers, 1900 to 1980.

***Biography—Government and Politics.*** Lists biographies and autobiographies of people in government and politics at home and abroad.

***Biography—The Arts.*** Lists biographies and autobiographies of people in the arts.

***Health.*** Lists braille, cassette, and disc books on the human body, physical health care, and medical history and research.

***Home Management.*** Lists braille, cassette, and disc books for consumers on home improvement and living, including cooking, gardening, child care, and finance.

***I Went to the Animal Fair.*** Lists braille, cassette, and disc books about animals. For children from preschool age to junior high level.

***Magazines.*** Lists magazines available in special formats.

***Religion.*** Lists fiction and nonfiction braille, cassette, and disc books about religions around the world, and other inspirational subjects.

***Science.*** Lists braille, cassette, and disc books on botany, astronomy, physics, and many other scientific and technological areas.

***Science Fiction.*** Lists braille, cassette, and disc science-fiction books.

***Sports.*** Lists braille, cassette, and disc books about sports and outdoor activities, and books by sportswriters on sports.

***Young Adult Fiction.*** Lists titles suitable for readers aged twelve to twenty and older.



## ***General Information Brochures***

***Books Talk.*** A print and flexible-disc brochure that describes the talking-book and braille program. Includes brief excerpts from talking books.

***A Music Library.*** Description of special large-print, recorded, and braille music materials and reference services available from NLS.

***Libros Parlantes, Libros en Braille.*** Description of NLS foreign-language services, in Spanish and English.

***Reading Is for Everyone.*** A print brochure that explains the braille and talking-book program, and eligibility requirements.

***Volunteers in Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.*** Description of volunteer activities, including braille transcription, narration of books, production of music materials, and machine repair.

***Volunteer Repair Services.*** Description of talking-book machine-repair program of Telephone Pioneers of America.

## ***Braille Samples***

***Alphabet Card.*** Information on braille with alphabet and numerals in print and in braille.

***Bookmark.*** Illustrated bookmark with the words “Reading is for Everyone” in print and in braille.

***Do You Know This Tune?*** Leaflet with braille music sample and clues for reading it.



## ***Directories and Reference Books***

***Library Resources for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.***

A directory of NLS network libraries and machine-lending agencies, including statistical and other program data.

***Planning Barrier Free Libraries.*** Guide for renovation and construction of libraries serving blind and physically handicapped readers.

***Volunteers Who Produce Books.*** A directory of volunteer groups and individuals across the nation who record and transcribe reading materials for blind and physically handicapped individuals.

## ***Special Reference Services***

Libraries, professionals and professional groups, and the public may request reference and referral services on the many aspects of blindness and physical handicaps (except medical and legal advice) from the NLS Reference Section. Materials on blindness and physical handicaps, including bibliographies, are produced regularly. Reference circulars are compiled on special topics, such as sports and games, braille instruction and writing equipment, and information for handicapped travelers. Overseas libraries interested in interlibrary loan and exchange of special-format materials should direct requests to the NLS Consumer Relations Section.



*For more information:*  
***National Library Service  
for the Blind and  
Physically Handicapped***

***The Library of Congress***  
***Washington, D.C. 20542***